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OUR VIEW

Independent investigations will keep railroads safe

There was a time in America when railroads were a sovereign power — close to being a fourth branch of government.

In the 19th century, thanks to their enormous land grants and economic clout, they had the power to make some communities boom or bust. They held plenty of sway in Washington, D.C., too.

Even today, railroads pull plenty of might down their tracks, and can wield similar power within the industries and economies that rely on them.

In the wake of June’s oil train derailment at Mosier, it is encouraging to see Oregon U.S. Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley try to hold the railroads accountable. The senators last week introduced legislation that would call for mandatory, independent investigations of oil train derailments.

The Mandate Oil Spill Investigations and Emergency Rules (MOSIER) Act of 2016 calls on the National Transportation Safety Board to investigate oil train derailments and gives the Federal Railroad Administration the authority to put a moratorium on oil trains until the investigations are complete.

Following the Mosier accident, the National Transportation Safety

Board did not investigate, because there were no injuries or fatalities. Union Pacific conducted its own investigation and identified loose links between rails and ties as the cause of the crash.

Wyden offered a colorful observation about the UP investigation. Having railroads investigate their own accidents is like “Colonel Sanders guarding the chicken coop,” the senator said. And we all know how that turns out for the chickens.

America’s freight railroad network is essential to our economy, especially here in Eastern Oregon. Union Pacific employs many locals, and the cost of many goods and services is set by how cheaply it can be transported to market.

But we don’t allow boat or car or plane companies to lead investigations of their crashes, so why would we allow it when the offending vehicle is a train? They should be held to the same standards, so as a nation we can be sure that railways are as safe as possible.

Railroads remain a great influencer on community health and welfare in our region. Holding them to high standards and requiring them to own up to and fix their mistakes is good for them and for us.

— **Sen. Ron Wyden,**
On having railroads investigate their own accidents

“Colonel Sanders guarding the chicken coop.”

Unsigned editorials are the opinion of the East Oregonian editorial board of Publisher Kathryn Brown, Managing Editor Daniel Wattenburger, and Opinion Page Editor Tim Trainor. Other columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of the East Oregonian.

OTHER VIEWS

Unclear, massive mandate would bloat Oregon state government

The Oregonian

If the secretary of state’s office really wants voters to understand how a massive corporate tax proposal on the November ballot would affect state spending, it should add this sobering sentence to the voters’ pamphlet description for Initiative Petition 28:

“The measure states that all revenue generated by the tax increase ‘shall’ go to education, health care and senior services; however, current and future Legislatures may choose to spend it in any way they see fit.”

Unfortunately, the current description for the measure, which would levy a 2.5 percent gross-receipts tax on certain corporations with more than \$25 million annually in Oregon sales, is not so clear. As *The Oregonian*/OregonLive’s Hillary Borrud reported, the draft financial estimate statement for IP 28 states the expected \$3 billion annually in revenue from the tax “will require increased expenditures by the state in the areas of public early childhood and kindergarten through grade 12 education, health care and senior services, but the exact amount and the specific uses within the three identified programs cannot be determined.”

The problem with that statement, however, is that the Legislature isn’t required to spend more money in just those three areas. IP 28 proposes a change in state law — not a change in the state Constitution — and the Legislature regularly revises such laws by passing new legislation and deciding where to appropriate state funds. That’s their job, after all. There’s no immunity for laws brought about by voter-approved initiatives.

As Legislative Counsel Dexter Johnson told *The Oregonian*/OregonLive editorial board, “when through the initiative process, a law is passed, the Legislature or voters in the future are free to change that.” His nonpartisan office, which does not take a position on initiatives, provides legal services to the Legislature.

The campaign behind IP 28 acknowledges lawmakers’ authority to change the law. But spokeswoman Katherine Driessen told the editorial board that “considering the billions of dollars of need in our critical services, we believe the Legislature won’t do that.”

But you don’t have to look far to see government officials already plotting how they would use such a big increase in revenue. Gov. Kate Brown already revealed the squishiness of any such spending directives when she released her “corporate tax implementation plan” last month, outlining how she would want to target spending if voters pass the measure. Not surprisingly, the plan calls for action in areas beyond education, health care and senior services.

For example, she includes proposals to increase assistance and tax credits for low-income families, as well as providing incentives for businesses to invest. They may be worthy programs to mitigate the expected negative effects of the gross-receipts tax, but they don’t fall within the education, health-care or senior-services areas that the measure dictates.

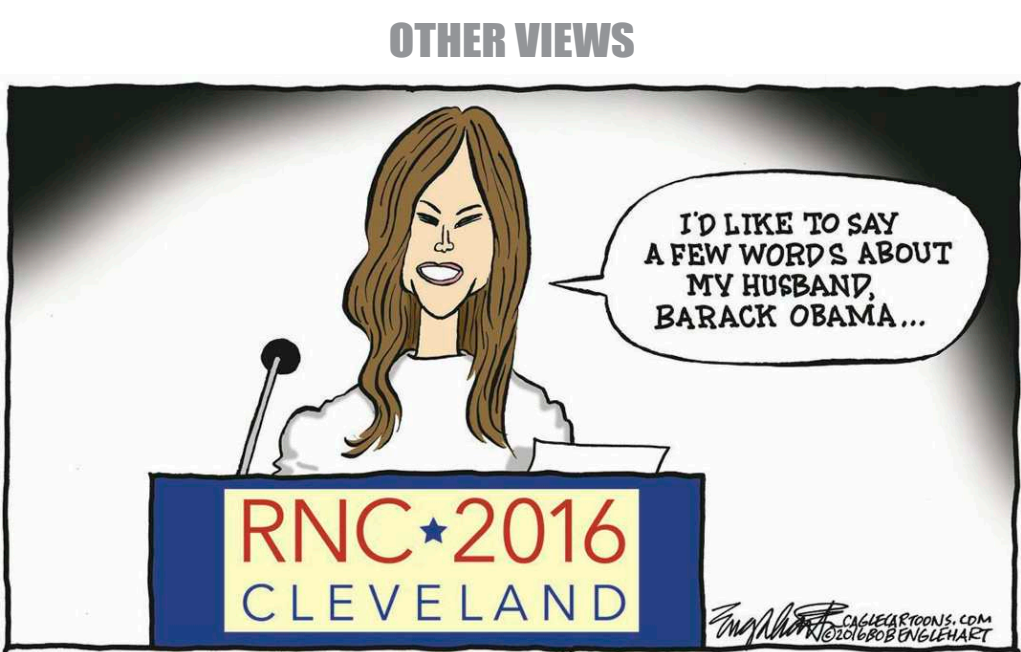
When asked about the inconsistency, Brown’s spokeswoman said new tax money would free up other general fund revenue to pay for such needs. But even that conflicts with the ballot measure, which calls for new revenue to be appropriated in addition to existing funding for those areas.

Certainly, voters could reasonably believe that some of that extra \$3 billion a year would go to education, health-care and senior services. Considering the size of the proposed tax increase would supersize the budget — general fund spending currently amounts to roughly \$9 billion a year — voters might be fine with lawmakers’ carving off some of those funds for non education, health-care and senior programs.

But voters should also weigh the cost at which that extra revenue will come. An analysis by the nonpartisan Legislative Revenue Office finds that the tax will act as a consumption tax passed on to all Oregonians, with low-income families disproportionately feeling the burden of such increases. The office also concludes the tax will likely dampen the state’s employment and economic growth.

There are so many problems with the tax that even Brown, in her “implementation plan,” acknowledges the need for legislative fixes if voters pass it. But that circular path only underscores the conclusion that voters should come to in voting against the measure. Setting tax policy is a responsibility best handled by legislators.

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OTHER VIEWS

Trump getting even Trumpier

Does anybody else have the sense that Donald Trump is slipping off the rails? His speeches have always had a rambling, free association quality, but a couple of the recent ones have, as the Republican political consultant Mike Murphy put it, passed from the category of rant to the category of full on “drunk wedding toast.”

Trump’s verbal style has always been distinct. He doesn’t really speak in sentences or paragraphs. His speeches are punctuated by five- or six-word jabs that are sort of strung together by connections that can only be understood through chaos theory: “They want the wall ... I dominated with the evangelicals ... I won in a landslide ... We can’t be the stupid people anymore.”

Occasionally Trump will attempt a sentence longer than eight words, but no matter what subject he starts the sentence with, by the end he has been pulled over to the subject of himself. Here’s an example from the Mike Pence announcement speech: “So one of the primary reasons I chose Mike was I looked at Indiana, and I won Indiana big.” There’s sort of a gravitational narcissistic pull that takes command whenever he attempts to utter a compound thought.

Trump has also always been a little engine fueled by wounded pride. For example, writing in BuzzFeed, McKay Coppins recalls the fusillade of abuse he received from Trump after writing an unflattering profile (he called Mar-a-Lago a “nice, if slightly dated, hotel”).

Trump was so inflamed he tweeted retaliation at Coppins several times a day and at odd hours, calling him a “dishonest slob” and “true garbage with no credibility.” The attacks went on impressively for over two years, which must rank Coppins in the top 100,000 on the list of people Donald Trump resents.

Over the past few weeks these longstanding Trump patterns have gone into hyperdrive. This is a unique moment in American political history in which the mental stability of one of the major party nominees is the dominating subject of conversation.

Everybody is telling Trump to ratchet it down and be more sober, but at a rally near Cincinnati this month and in his Pence announcement speech on Saturday, Trump launched his verbal rocket ship straight through the stratosphere, and it landed somewhere on the dark side of Planet Debbie.

The Pence announcement was truly the strangest vice-presidential unveiling in recent political history. Ricocheting around the verbal wilds for more than twice as long as the man he was introducing, Trump even refused to remain onstage and gaze on admiringly

as Pence flattered him. It was like watching a guy lose interest in a wedding when the bride appears.

The structure of his mental perambulations also seems to have changed. Formerly, as I said, his speeches had a random, free-form quality. But on Saturday his remarks had a distinct through line, anchored by the talking points his campaign had written down on pieces of paper. But Trump could not keep his attention focused on this through line — since the subject was someone else — so every 30 seconds or so he would shoot off on a resentment-filled bragging loop.

If you had to do a rough diagram of the Trump remarks it would be something like this: Pence ... I was right about Iraq ... Pence ... Hillary Clinton is a crooked liar ... I was right about “Brexit” ... Pence ... Hillary Clintons ads are filled with lies ... We’re going to bring back the coal industry ... Christians love me ... Pence ... I talk to statisticians ... Pence is good looking ... My hotel in Washington is really coming along fantastically ... Pence.

Donald Trump is in his moment of greatest triumph, but he seems more resentful and embattled than ever. Most political conventions are happy coronations, but this one may come to feel like the Alamo of aggrieved counterattacks.

Trump could not keep his attention focused, so every 30 seconds or so he would shoot off on a resentment-filled bragging loop.

It’s hard to know exactly what is going on in that brain, but science lends a clue. Psychologists wonder if narcissists are defined by extremely high self-esteem or by extremely low self-esteem that they are trying to mask. The current consensus seems to be that they are marked by unstable self-esteem. Their self-confidence can be both high and fragile, so they perceive ego threat all around.

Maybe as Trump has gotten more successful his estimation of what sort of adoration he deserves has increased while the outside criticism has gotten more pronounced. This combination is bound to leave his ego threat sensors permanently inflamed. So even if Candidate Trump is told to make a normal political point, Inner Boy Trump will hijack the microphone for another bout of resentful boasting.

Suddenly the global climate favors a Trump candidacy. Some forms of disorder — like a financial crisis — send voters for the calm supple thinker. But other forms of disorder — blood in the streets — send them scurrying for the brutal strongman.

If the string of horrific events continues, Trump could win the presidency. And he could win it even though he has less and less control over himself.

■

David Brooks became a New York Times Op-Ed columnist in September 2003.

YOUR VIEWS

Black Lives Matter, right-wing groups have lots in common

Consider the predominantly black protesters of Black Lives Matter, who are currently protesting racial profiling conducted by police departments nationwide, and the predominantly white protesters of Citizens for Constitutional Freedom, the group who occupied Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in Harney County, protesting what they perceived as an overreaching government.

Both groups have motivated law enforcement to call for the suspension of core American rights. Both have organized protests that included armed demonstrators. This raises the question: Are BLM and CCF more alike than either cares to admit? Do either of these groups hold the answer to the problem that they set out to solve?

If that question was a headline, the answer is most likely a resounding no. But since real life is more complex than any headline, Betteridge’s law of headlines does not apply. Or does it? Betteridge based his law on the idea that a headline ending in a question mark most likely was the product of a journalist who was lazy, seeking to transform mundane news into a national controversy.

To be clear, every one of the police-involved shootings that BLM has protested

is a tragedy. The spirit of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 would strip federal funding from every police department that was found to be practicing racial profiling. The Hammond arson case, which prompted the formation of CCF and the occupation of the wildlife refuge, was a travesty of justice. It is doubtful that the imprisonment of cowboys in Oregon was the spirit of the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996, yet the cowboys are sitting in prison today.

It’s easy to call BLM racist, because they focus on the racial profiling of non-white citizens. CCF is easily cast as racist, since they were predominantly white Christian males who had an affinity for firearms.

Is either group inherently racist? Probably not, but only when the majority of the voting population calls for changes in the current system is the government compelled to provide those changes to its citizens. It is necessary to vote!

Many in the 18-24-year-old age demographic support BLM, but only 58.5 percent of them vote. Many in the age 75+ demographic historically believed that the civil rights movement was too radical, and 76.6 percent of them vote. What does this tell you?

James Tibbets
Pendleton

LETTERS POLICY

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